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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet summarizes information about the education-related services provided by federal/state-funded Vocational Rehabilitation Services and describes how to gain access to them. In a question/answer format, the guide discusses how to find the local vocational rehabilitation office, how to contact the office, procedures involved in acquiring services, determination of eligibility, payment of services, the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan, how to handle disagreements with vocational rehabilitation counselors, and termination of vocational rehabilitation services. (JDD)

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HEATH Resource Center
Higher Education and Adult Training for people with Handicaps

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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES
A POSTSECONDARY STUDENT CONSUMER'S GUIDE

Students with disabilities, their parents, and professional advisors frequently have questions about how to use the Vocational Rehabilitation Services. This guide summarizes information about the education related services of this federal-state funded program and how to gain access to them.

What is Vocational Rehabilitation?

Vocational Rehabilitation is the nationwide federal-state program for assisting eligible people with disabilities to define a suitable employment goal and to become employed. Since education and training at a vocational or technical school, college or university may be part of the plan to reach that goal, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies often provide both counseling and financial assistance to students with disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation may be referred to as "Voc Rehab" or "VR."

Where can I find Voc Rehab offices?

All states, territories, and trust areas have a vocational rehabilitation agency. The nature and scope of services may vary from state to state. In some states there are two agencies: a general agency and one for persons who are legally blind. In other states, there is one agency to serve people with all disabilities. Each state agency has a central or administrative office and district offices that usually are located conveniently throughout the state. To find the Vocational Rehabilitation agency in your area look under the state listing in the telephone book. Local libraries, health and human service offices, and high school guidance offices will also be able to tell you how to contact the local VR office. For the address of your State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency request a "State Agencies List" from the National Rehabilitation Information Center, NARIC, 8455 Colesville Road, Suite 935, Silver Spring, MD 20910. In MD (301) 588-9284 (V/TDD) or (800) 346-2742 (V/TDD).

How do I contact the local VR office?

It is best to make the first contact with your VR office by phone or letter to request an appointment. You may do this yourself or have a counselor or other professional do so. Usually a trained receptionist will answer your questions, schedule you for an orientation session, or arrange for an interview with a rehabilitation counselor. You are also welcome to make a personal visit during business hours which are usually 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. If you drop-in, you will be seen by an intake counselor or be given an interview appointment for a later time.

What will happen when I go to a VR office?

You will be asked to complete a formal application to receive services. The application generally consists of a personal data form which you must sign. A staff person will probably be available to assist with the completion of the application form.

You will be assigned to the vocational rehabilitation counselor who serves the area where you live or who specializes in your disability. The counselor will ask you to make an appointment to have a general medical examination. Depending on your particular disability, other evaluations may be required such as vision, hearing, psychological tests or other special studies. If you have had such examinations done recently and reports can be obtained, these will be helpful. Examinations are necessary since VR must have medical evidence that you have a disability, that the disability limits the type of work you can do, and that you will be able to work if VR services are provided. If it is necessary to get new examinations, VR will pay for them.

Other pertinent records such as school transcripts, work history, military records, and perhaps social security data, may be requested to help plan an appropriate rehabilitation plan. If you have them, it will be helpful to bring these records with you for your initial interview with the VR counselor, otherwise your counselor will ask you to sign a release so they may be requested directly.

Will I automatically receive services if I have a disability?

No. The VR program is an *eligibility* program, not an *entitlement* program. This means that the determination of eligibility is an

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individualized process based on your unique situation. You are not automatically eligible just because you have a disability. Eligibility is determined by a state rehabilitation counselor based on criteria in the state approved VR plan.

How will my eligibility be determined?

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 930-112), as amended, requires the states to give priority to individuals who are most severely handicapped. This applies to the process of determining eligibility and to the delivery of services.

Eligibility for rehabilitation services is determined on the basis of three criteria:

1. You must have a physical or mental disability.

2. Your disability creates or causes a substantial handicap to employment.

3. There is a reasonable expectation that the provision of vocational rehabilitation services can make you employable.

According to the Rehabilitation regulations, a *physical or mental disability* means "a physical or mental condition which materially limits, contributes to limiting, or if not corrected, will probably result in limiting an individual's activities or functioning." Also as defined by regulations, a *substantial handicap to employment* means "that a physical or mental disability (in light of attendant medical, psychological, vocational, educational, or related factors) impedes an individual's occupational performance by preventing obtaining, retaining, or preparing for employment consistent with his/her capabilities and abilities."

Employability with regard to vocational rehabilitation refers to "a determination that the provision of vocational rehabilitation services will enable an individual to obtain or retain employment consistent with his/her capacities and abilities in the competitive labor market, (such as the practice of a profession), self employment, homemaking, farm or family work (including work for which payment is in kind rather than in cash), sheltered employment, homebound employment, supported employment, or other gainful work."

The determination of eligibility can be more than a simple matter of reviewing data and making a decision in a few days. It often takes special time and effort to ascertain eligibility. This is particularly true if you have a severe handicap. In these situations, the state rehabilitation counselor may decide that an extension of time is necessary to consider adequately all factors. The state VR program permits an extended evaluation period to determine your eligibility if there is a question about your employability. The extended evaluation period will be terminated whenever an eligibility determination can be made but will last no longer than eighteen months.

The application of the eligibility criteria must be made without regard to your race, sex, color, creed or national origin. A state may not impose any prior residential requirements as a condition for eligibility.

If you are not eligible for services you must be notified in writing of this decision, the basis for it, your right to appeal, and the process for doing so.

Who will pay for these services?

If you are eligible for VR you will be asked to provide information concerning your income and your expenses. This information is necessary so that the counselor can determine how much you can contribute to your rehabilitation program. In some cases, VR may be able to pay for all services you need if you are not able to contribute. The counselor will fully explain these arrangements before you begin a rehabilitation program.

Federal regulations require that VR work directly with postsecondary financial aid officers to determine what portions of postsecondary educational expenses will be met by VR and which will be met in other ways. Before VR can do this, **you must apply for federal student financial aid** using the FAF or other standardized national needs analysis required by your school. Federal regulations require that financial aid funding be used to meet your education costs before VR assistance can considered. That is, the primary funding for postsecondary education related expenses is student financial aid, while VR is responsible for disability-related costs. For more information regarding Student Financial Aid, ask for the HEATH fact sheet, **Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities.**

What is an IWRP?

When you have been declared eligible for services, you and your counselor will develop an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan, or IWRP, to specify the services to be provided and your employment goals. Your responsibilities and those of the counselor are outlined in the IWRP. The counselor is responsible to be helpful as you complete your rehabilitation and to assist in obtaining appropriate employment. The counselor must also offer the services necessary for your to keep your job. You will receive a copy of the IWRP.

The IWRP is very important. It becomes the written plan of action between you and the state agency.

The IWRP requires the consent of both you and the counselor (and your parents or guardian if you are a minor). In some cases it also requires the approval of a rehabilita-

tion supervisor or administrator. Some rehabilitation programs may take several years to complete. Situations and circumstances may develop which were unforseeable at the time the program was written. Modifications and amendments to the original program can be made when there is reasonable and logical justification for so doing. You should receive a copy of modifications and amendments to your IWRP.

Clients must meet with their rehabilitation counselor regularly to insure that the rehabilitation program is procceding as planned and to allow adequate time for necessary authorizations for services to be processed.

It is very important to get paperwork completed before it is due so that there is time to deal with the unexpected. Don't assume that VR and your school will take care of everything. You as a client/student have a major responsibility to meet deadlines, keep your VR counselor informed of school requirements and due dates and to let him/her know of your progress toward your academic and vocational goals. You are responsible for the success of your rehabilitation program; your counselor will be an assistant to you.

What if I disagree with my VR counselor?

Differences of opinion concerning rehabilitation services can develop between a counselor and client. Talk over your concerns about services with your counselor. In most cases, the two of you will be able to solve problems. If you still do not agree with your counselor, you may discuss it with your counselor's supervisor.

If you do not choose to talk to the supervisor, or you still do not feel satisfied after you do talk, contact the State Director of Vocational Rehabilitation to request a formal hearing.

Your counselor or the supervisor of your Rehabilitation Office will provide the name, address, and telephone number of the State Director's office. A written request is often helpful.

In addition, there is a Client Assistance Program (CAP) which can provide advice and assistance in resolving the problems you are having with vocational rehabilitation services. Your counselor is required to give you the information you need to contact the CAP.

When will VR services stop?

Your case will remain open until you are successfully rehabilitated or a determination is made that you cannot achieve a vocational rehabilitation goal. Under the vocational rehabilitation program, you are not considered "rehabilitated" until the state VR agency determines that you have been suitably and satisfactorily employed for at least 60 days.

Fall, 1989. Revised by Ann Davie, HEATH Resource Center from a document originally prepared by Nancy L. Stout, March 1983.

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HEATH PUBLICATIONS LIST

The HEATH Resource Center operates the national clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with handicaps. *HEATH* is an acronym for Higher Education and Adult Training for people with Handicaps. Support from the United States Department of Education enables the Center, a program of the American Council on Education, to serve as an information exchange about educational support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, and opportunities on American campuses, vocational-technical schools, adult education programs, independent living centers, and other training entities after high school. The Center gathers and disseminates this information so that people with disabilities can develop their full potential through postsecondary education and training if they choose.

RESOURCE PAPERS

____ Access to the Science and Engineering Lab and Classroom
____ Career Planning and Placement Strategies
____ Cost Effective Ideas (for administrators)
____ Education Beyond High School — the Choice is Yours
____ Education for Employment (vocational education)
____ Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities
____ Head Injury Survivor on Campus: Issues and Resources
____ Hearing Impaired Students in Postsecondary Education
____ Learning Disabled Adults in Postsecondary Education
____ Make the Most of Your Opportunities
____ Measuring Student Progress in the Classroom
____ Opportunities After High School for Persons who are Severely Handicapped
____ Strategies for Advising Disabled Students
____ Vocational Rehabilitation Services — a Student Consumer's Guide
____ Young Adults with Learning Disabilities and Other Special Needs: Guide for Selecting Postsecondary Transition Programs

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

____ College Freshmen with Disabilities: Preparing for Employment
____ ✦HEATH Brochure
____ ✦HEATH Resource Directory
____ ✦How to Choose A College: Guide for the Student with a Disability
____ Newsletter back issues as available
____ Newsletter Subscription
____ Resources for Adults with Learning Disabilities

Single copies of *HEATH* resource papers are free to those who request them. Permission to duplicate *HEATH* materials is not necessary and is definitely encouraged.

Is there a topic about which you need specific information which is not listed here? Contact *HEATH* staff, who may be able to select the information you need from the *HEATH* Library, Topic File, or Campus Resource File.

SPECIAL RESOURCES

Multiple copies of the ✦ starred publications may be ordered on a cost recovery basis. For details call *HEATH* toll-free at (800) 544-3284 or 939-9320 in the Washington, DC metro area.

ALTERNATE MEDIA

Current *HEATH* publications are available on cassette from *HEATH* or through the Martin Luther King Regional Library (Washington, DC), a unit of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Please send Audio Cassette ____

HEATH materials are also available in computer media for MS-DOS compatible or Macintosh computers.

Computer Media: ___ MS-DOS.___ Macintosh
(Please enclose a blank 5 1/4" or 3 1/2" DD/DS diskette.)

Please mail back to HEATH Resource Center, One Dupont Circle, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036-1193. SpecialNet users may order directly to HEATH.ACE. CompuServe subscribers may order via Easyplex ID 73257,14.

Name _____

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City State Zip

Check the one that best describes you.

__ Person with a disability
__ Parent
__ Administrator
__ Advocate
__ Teacher/Instructor
__ Counselor
__ Other (specify) _____